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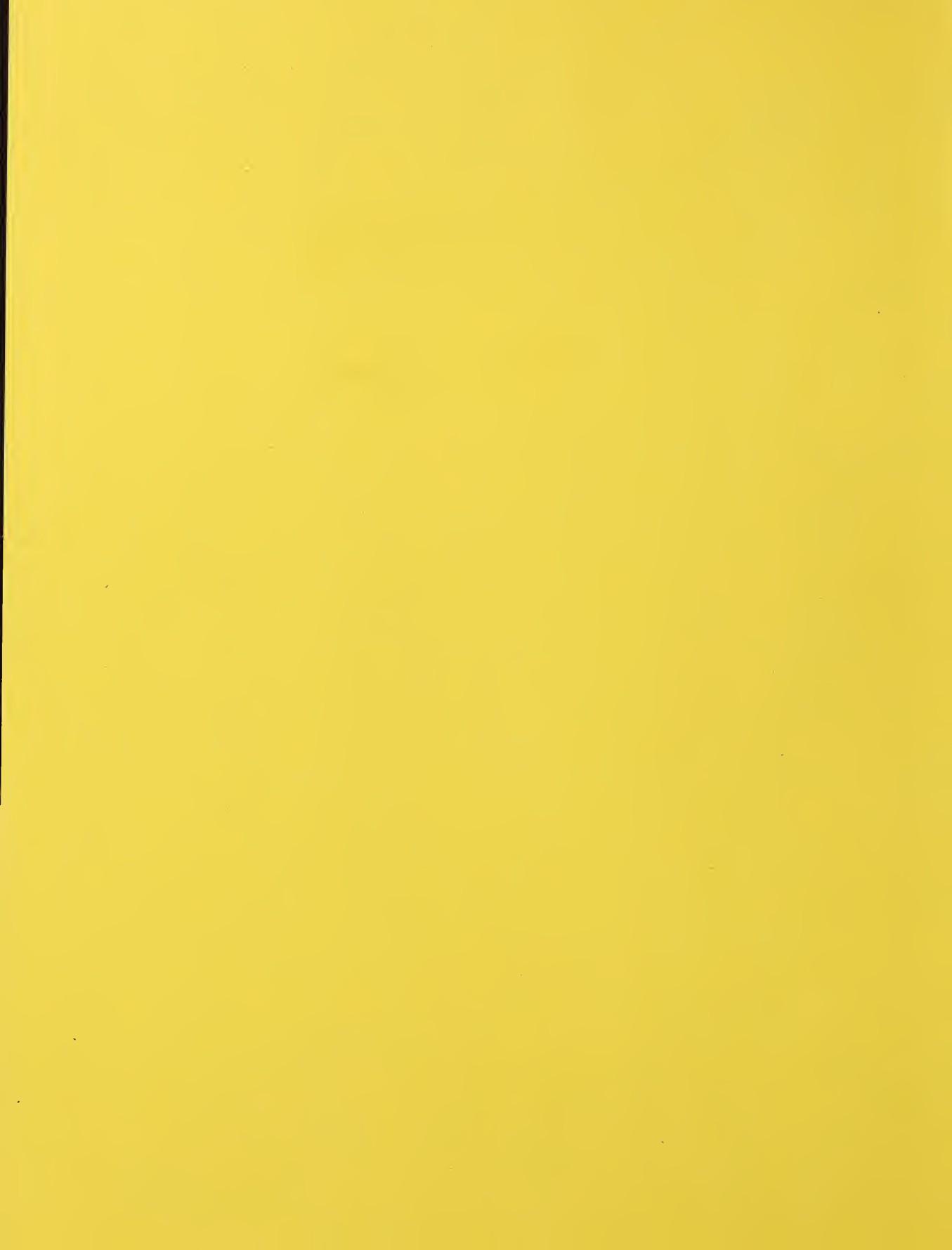
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MASSACHUSETTS HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE NETWORK



SEPTEMBER, 1994





The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education

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September 1994

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to announce a new high school initiative, the **Massachusetts High School Alliance Network**. The faculty of high schools, colleges, universities, and community organizations are invited to join together in the interest of students and practitioners to offer high quality professional development opportunities to their own "community of learners".

The Alliance Network provides a structured environment in which administrators and teachers of high school students can support each other in the acquisition and application of knowledge supported by current research. This environment of collaborative professional development encourages the sharing of best practices, offers opportunities for innovation, and encourages collegiality among committed professionals. Through participation in the Massachusetts High School Alliance Network practitioners assume responsibility for their own continuous professional growth and development.

I look forward to working together assisting administrators and teachers to reach their full potential in educating high school students in the Commonwealth and in preparing these students to lead productive, fulfilling and successful lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert V. Antonucci".

Robert V. Antonucci
Commissioner of Education

MASSACHUSETTS HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE NETWORK

BACKGROUND

A review of current practice in Massachusetts high schools reveals much disparity in course taking patterns, instruction and practice, course content, and expectations of students. There is little evidence that all students graduating from Massachusetts high schools consistently achieve mastery in specific subject areas, or develop the higher order thinking skills so necessary for lifelong learners and future success in the 21st century. The 1992 Massachusetts Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) reports that only 29% of 12th grade students perform at or above a mastery level in Reading; only 23% perform at or above mastery level in writing; only 27% perform at or above mastery level in mathematics; only 31% perform at or above mastery level in science; and only 30% perform at or above mastery level in social studies. What this tells us is that high schools need to become more successful at educating all of our students.

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 calls for improvements which will address the needs of students, teachers, and the educational system in preparing students for active participation in a democratic society and for the national and global economy. Eliminating the general track, providing standards and expectations for all students, and requiring a tenth-grade competency statewide assessment test are major goals of this Act. Restructuring our high schools to meet these goals will challenge all schools to change the curriculum, instructional and assessment practices, schedules, teacher roles, student grouping, and expectations for student achievement. It will also require the involvement of all constituencies in reconfiguring our high schools - teachers, counselors, administrators, students, parents, communities, higher education, and business. Innovative approaches to these challenges have been successful at the middle grade level and in some individual high schools within the state. With these models as a starting point, we now undertake the task of restructuring all of Massachusetts high schools.

THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The cognitive and social development of high school students takes great strides during the four-year high school experience. Young adolescents enter ninth grade in various stages of puberty. Some are just beginning to manifest the physical changes of this developmental stage while others may present the physical appearance of young

women and men. Students can increasingly think in conceptual and abstract terms, and apply these new concepts to other situations. Virtually all ninth grade students are at the early stages of developing more mature social skills and an increased sense of self identity. Somehow during this four-year adventure they will become late adolescents and young adults prepared to enter the world of higher education or career exploration.

The expanding role of education demands that by the time these students graduate, they are able to think critically, apply knowledge to solve complex problems, communicate effectively in a diverse environment, and to become informed parents, citizens, and consumers.

The development of higher level thinking skills and increasingly high expectations and responsibilities require basic changes in schools as institutions to allow students to reach their full potential and continue as lifelong learners and citizens in our society. The high school experience needs to transform from a fragmented series of courses which include lecture, memorization, and multiple choice testing to an integrated program of learning by doing, teamwork by students and teachers, and demonstration of knowledge through projects and exhibitions. Such a challenge will necessarily include attention to the transition of students from the middle grades to high school, and from high school to higher education and/or career training. Structures which support these goals include professional development opportunities, alliances of schools and other institutions, mentoring/sharing between schools, and partnerships among schools, colleges, communities, and business.

The Massachusetts Middle Grade Alliance Network has demonstrated the success of collaborative and sustained professional development over time to address change in the middle grade schools. Through collaborative professional development, teachers have become leaders in the movement of change. Innovative practices have been developed and shared between schools. Alliance teachers have an increased understanding and appreciation of differences across school districts and among teachers. With the advent of the Education Reform Act it is now an opportune time to bring high schools and colleges together in High School Alliances. The purpose of the Alliances will be to engage in collaborative professional development opportunities that assist high schools in setting high standards and expectations for all students.

RATIONALE

Today, schools and other community institutions have the enormous challenge of preparing students to be thoughtful, productive and responsible citizens in a democratic society. Under the Education Reform Act, high expectations and standards will be set for all students. This means successfully keeping students in school through high school graduation, and engaging them in learning experiences that raise academic achievement, increase their cognitive skills and address their individual social,

emotional, and physical needs.

To accomplish this, structures need to be developed which bring high school educators and other professionals together to conduct action research, study areas of common concern, and share strategies which lead to systemic change and improvement in the education of high school students and preparation of prospective high school teachers. Collaborative partnerships between schools and with other institutions serving students can significantly enhance school improvement efforts.

Additionally, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 has directed all schools to begin school improvement plans which specifically address sustained professional development planning for entire schools and districts. New regulations and standards regarding certification, recertification and individual professional development plans for teachers also support the establishment of collaborative professional development structures.

The notion of High School Alliances is built upon the learning gained from research and the experiences of practitioners in assisting school improvement efforts.

Practitioners need multiple opportunities for exposure to information, research and innovation outside of their background of experience.

Exposure to educational research and innovation often spurs individual growth and usually is the precursor to institutional change. Conversely, isolation stifles innovation and growth. Innovation is more difficult to implement and sustain when staff are divorced from what research says is sound educational practice, when staff do not have opportunities to observe innovations in other settings, and when staff are not able to collaborate with others.

Practitioners often learn best from other practitioners. It is often easier to imagine, plan and implement change when there are opportunities to interact with other practitioners about their successes and failures in implementing innovative practices.

Practitioners need time to meet and talk in order to make informed decisions about trying an innovation. Innovations usually occur when staff are allotted significant planning and staff development time. Yet, teachers and school administrators rarely have extended time to share, discuss, reflect and plan. Rarely do staff from other institutions that work with adolescents have time to meet together to work on common goals and strategies.

Collaboration can expand exposure to and opportunities for growth and innovation. When people of varied backgrounds and areas of expertise are brought together to study a problem, the richness of diverse perspectives and enhanced resources can lead to more fruitful discussion and problem-solving.

Practitioners need to connect content and practices in the high school to the expectations and experiences that lay ahead for students in the world of higher education, careers and community involvement. The opportunity to share these links between schools can enrich and expand the possibilities in each school of how to prepare students for the future.

PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCES

The Massachusetts High School Alliance Network will be a network of high schools, higher education institutions, non-profit organizations, and businesses that share geographic proximity and that join together for the purpose of conducting collaborative professional development activities. The purpose of these activities will be to promote systemic change which restructures high schools, reforms high school teacher preparation institutions, and integrates community services into high schools. The High School Alliances will have the added component of linking middle schools which have participated in successful Middle Grade Alliances to high schools beginning this project. The participation of high school students in Alliance activities will also be encouraged. Through each High School Alliance, it is hoped that an increased focus upon collaborative professional development will spawn an increase in innovative practices, policies and structures within each member institution. The end goal of each High School Alliance is to increase the collaboration between all institutions working with adolescents in order to increase school success for high school students.

High School Alliance activities will include:

Joint Professional Development and In-Depth Inquiry. These activities are voluntary and decided upon jointly by all participating institutions. In-depth inquiry into a range of issues can lead directly to improvement in high school education, human services delivery and teacher preparation. Activities in which Alliances will engage include the following: study groups, extended seminar series, cross-school visits, job-alikes, mini-grants to cross-school teacher teams to develop curriculum, college courses, monthly dinner "chalk-talk" sessions, teacher observations, and peer coaching.

Communication and Collaboration. High School Alliances create a structure that increases communication and collaboration between all institutions that work with adolescents. Creating a formal network of participating institutions fosters the development of mutual goals and activities, and reduces activities that overlap or are at cross-purposes.

Connecting Research to Practice. Often, because of lack of time and opportunities, educators are divorced from what educational research has found to work and not

work. An Alliance encourages the use of current research to resolve the practical challenges facing educators today.

Sharing Resources. In these tight fiscal times, professional development funds and opportunities are limited. By pooling resources between institutions, the opportunities available for all staff increase multifold. Knowledge about the successes, obstacles and challenges of reform can be shared between institutions, thereby enhancing the prospects of successful innovation.

Developing a Common Mission. Through joint planning and participation in shared professional development, institutions begin to discuss and come to agreement on shared goals for educating high school students. This can often lead to a more deliberate process of arriving at common mission statements shared by collaborating institutions.

Action Research. Alliances provide opportunities for conducting joint action research on innovative ideas that respond to identified problems. For example, college/university faculty can assist high school teachers in setting up a research model to assess the impact of a new instructional strategy.

Increased Use of Educational Technology. Alliances create natural opportunities to increase the use of educational technology through telecommunication and interactive networking.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Collaboration between institutions is not always easy. Each institution brings a unique set of knowledge and expertise. Successfully combining these strengths is the key to creating effective collaborative partnerships. Characteristics of productive collaboration include:

- Commitment to a shared mission between the institutions
- Identified annual objectives that guide the partnership's activities
- Clear governance structures of shared decision-making that ensure input from all member institutions
- Shared resources, with each member institution contributing to the pool
- Established lines of fiscal responsibility
- An environment of support and collegiality

HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE FRAMEWORK

During the 1994-1995 school year, four High School Alliances will be established. Each Alliance will be composed of 10-15 institutions including high schools, higher education institutions, non-profit organizations and businesses for purposes of joint professional development. The end goal of each Alliance will be to promote systemic change in all institutions to increase school success of high school students. The High School Alliances may benefit from linkage to the Middle Grades Alliance Network which is in the third year of collaboration. The Massachusetts Department of Education will assist in the planning, design and implementation of each Alliance.

APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

High schools, higher education institutions, and other institutions concerned about the success of high school students are invited to apply to become a member of one of the High School Alliances by submitting a completed application to the Department of Education. Criteria for selection will include commitment to high school restructuring and/or teacher preparation reform as evidenced by current planning, policies and practices; a commitment to collaborative professional development activities; and ensuring a geographical balance and a diversity in the kinds of communities and student population.

The Department of Education will select the High School Alliance member organizations and cluster them geographically. Each Alliance will contain approximately 10 high schools, representing a diversity in kind of community, and a small number of colleges/universities, non-profit organizations and businesses.

Alliance members will be notified of their selection in November 1994, and will be asked to send teams to participate in a day-long orientation and planning institute sponsored by the Department of Education in December 1994. Orientations will include an in-depth discussion of the purpose and process of creating High School Alliances, time for member organizations to meet and network with teams from other member schools, and initial planning for each Alliance.

Each Alliance will set aside additional planning time to discuss membership criteria, fees and benefits; creating a governance structure; selecting an institution to coordinate Alliance finances; and developing and conducting a professional development needs assessment survey within each member organization.

At a planning meeting after the orientation, each Alliance will select an institution to coordinate Alliance finances. This organization can be any of an Alliance's member organizations, and is responsible for acting as the treasurer for the Alliance. This role

includes receiving all institution membership fees and Department of Education grants and contracts, and paying all Alliance expenses.

The selection process should be by consensus, with Alliance members discussing the role and responsibilities of this institution; discussing criteria for selection; ascertaining interest among Alliance members; and determining the best match. Criteria for selection should include capacity to act as grant and contract recipient and ease in receiving funds and processing payments.

HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE BUDGETS

Each member institution will be asked to annually contribute a small amount of funds (recommended \$1000.) to the Alliance. These funds will be contributed at the beginning of each fiscal year to a special account set up by each Alliance's fiscal coordinating institution. In addition, the Department of Education will notify the Alliance Network of grants or contracts for which they are an eligible applicant. For the FY95, the Department of Education will contribute \$10,000 to each High School Alliance. This amount will increase to \$25,000 per Alliance for FY96. All Department of Education funds are subject to annual appropriation.

Schools or organizations should not be discouraged from joining an Alliance because of lack of funds. Alliances and interested organizations should think creatively about how to raise funds for the Alliance. For example, corporate sponsorship is one avenue to pursue. Some districts may be willing to contribute the annual Alliance membership fee from the central administration budget or from other Department grants.

The pooled funds will be used as the Alliance operating budget, with finance decisions made by each Alliance's governing body. Membership within each Alliance should entitle any staff/person within member organizations to free or reduced cost access to all Alliance professional development activities.

ALLIANCE GOVERNANCE

Each High School Alliance will form a shared decision-making body, or a Steering Committee, which will be composed of designated representatives of each member institution. This body will meet regularly and be responsible for making all major decisions of the Alliance, including:

- Guidelines for membership, including annual membership fees,
- Development of a mission statement for the Alliance,
- Design and administration of an annual professional development needs survey,

- Creation of annual professional development objectives and a calendar of professional development events,
- Evaluation of Alliance activities, and
- Monitoring of the Alliance's fiscal activities.

Each Alliance should select officers of the Steering Committee that are responsible for facilitating the work of the committee. Normally, officer roles include Chairperson or Co-Chairs, Secretary/Recorder and Treasurer. The Treasurer should be a representative of the fiscal coordinating institution.

FOCUS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Education Reform Act establishes professional development for educators as a priority for the public schools of the Commonwealth. Ongoing and high quality professional development enables both students and adults to take active responsibility for their own learning in order to prepare students to succeed.

Components of successful high school restructuring include:

Changes in School Organization

- Strengthening the role of School Councils. School Councils allow those who are impacted by decisions to be included in the decision-making process.
- Site-based management brings together school constituents to allocate resources and direct school activities to meet the needs of students.
- Teaming teachers breaks the mold of the traditional fragmentation of curriculum. Common planning time and appropriate training are keys to successful team teaching.
- Block scheduling opens the door for more extended learning blocks of time. In-depth inquiry requires more than the traditional 45-50 minute period. Teachers and teacher teams have flexibility in planning innovative activities.
- Breaking large comprehensive schools down into smaller programs, each with an identifiable program focus and geographical area of the school. This model creates small schools within one large institution, and allows for the creation of a community of students who feel connected and involved. Each community would include a cross-section of students from different grade levels and achievement levels.
- Eliminating the general track. This includes eliminating those basic, remedial, and general courses that provide students with lowered expectations and a watered-down curriculum, and strengthening the academic rigor of courses, school-to-work programs, and student support.

Changes in Curriculum/Teaching

- Thinking skills are critical to the student's future in a complex society and competitive work environment. Instructional strategies that cultivate thinking skills include using good questioning techniques, providing in-depth treatment of fewer topics, and modeling creativity and problem solving.
- Framing instruction and the curriculum on in-depth inquiry into real-life problems and issues, with a focus on application of concepts learned, creates a more dynamic learning process. This approach calls for increased use of project-based, small group, and cooperative learning.
- Performance-based education defines specific standards for curriculum required of all students. High expectations of student performance helps students meet high performance standards.
- Alternative assessment techniques use portfolios, projects, exhibitions and other forms of demonstration to measure student performance and progress towards

education standards.

Technology

- CD-ROM technology is a powerful technology for storing large data bases, encyclopedias, and other print and video information. This resource provides easy access to a wealth of resources. Computer literacy is essential to the future lives of students and CD-ROM is fast becoming an important tool of technology.
- Modems provide access to information from a variety of networks and databanks. Students and teachers learn to search and evaluate information and communicate and share information with their counterparts in other schools.
- Multimedia systems allow the combination of text, data, audio, graphic, animation, and video into a computer-controlled interactive product. This new technology may be explored for use in developing reports, presenting information, and creating portfolios.

ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

In the spring of each year, the Steering Committee of each Alliance will design and conduct a professional development needs assessment survey in all member institutions. The survey will be designed to identify the key areas of professional development that would encourage systemic change in each member institution, as well as identify what would be the most appropriate forum in which to address each topic.

The survey results will be compiled during the late spring and summer to identify priority areas for professional development that are common to the majority of member institutions. The Steering Committee will then establish three to four annual professional development objectives; create an appropriate design of professional development activities for each objective; and establish an annual calendar of professional development activities. Whenever possible the planning process employed by an Alliance should be compatible with the professional development plans developed by participating schools and districts.

The calendar of activities will then be distributed to faculty within all Alliance member organizations. The Steering Committee will assign facilitating responsibility for each professional development activity that is conducted.

Staff from each Alliance member school or organization will receive the annual professional development calendar and have the opportunity to sign up for activities or groups of interest. Member schools and organizations will make the commitment to provide the necessary release time for participation in Alliance events.

STATE SUPPORT OF ALLIANCES

The Massachusetts Department of Education will provide support to each Alliance through the following:

- Eligibility for grants or contracts to be determined annually and subject to appropriation,
- A kick-off orientation training day for teams from each member institution,
- An annual statewide High School Alliance Conference, featuring presentations from each Alliance,
- One to two annual statewide Steering Committee Institutes, to network and problem-solve how to strengthen each Alliance,
- Technical assistance in setting up governance structures, conducting needs assessments and developing annual professional development calendars, and
- Assistance in locating and accessing professional development resources.

TIMELINE FOR 1994-1995 FOR HIGH SCHOOL ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES

October 1994	Applications for Alliance membership are made available to interested high schools.
December 1994	Announcement of selection of members of the Massachusetts High School Alliances.
January 1995	Kick-off orientation training day for Alliances. Distribution of Professional Development Need Assessment Survey.
February - March 1995	<p>Planning period for Alliances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set membership criteria and benefits• Create a governance structure• Select an institution to coordinate Alliance finances• Conduct needs assessment survey• Develop a calendar of professional development activities <p>Results of professional development needs assessment surveys are compiled, tabulated and translated into objectives and a calendar of joint professional development activities.</p>
March 31, 1995	Calendars of professional development activities and information for directories of member schools and officers, and other materials to be shared should be submitted to:
	<i>Melissa T. Williams Instruction and Curriculum Services Massachusetts Department of Education 350 Main Street Malden, MA 02148</i>
April - June 1995	Alliance professional development activities are conducted.
May 1995	First Annual Statewide Conference of the Massachusetts High School Alliance Network

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